

# **Going Corporate?**

## **What's the heck is going on at the Ranch**

**By J.J. Johnson 08.04.01**

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Yes, you the Sierra Times reader, deserve an explanation. During the past week, the ranch hands have been as busy as they've ever been dealing with growing pains - and a few other things that need to be addressed, including Roadhouse Sierra. The situation here is about to turn me white. So, before I go postal, let me tell you the whole story.

[WARNING: This article may ruffle the feathers of some corporate bosses out there - especially on the Internet]

Over the past week, some personnel changes were made. Before and since that time, the staff has been busy getting everything upgraded to stay competitive. But as fate would have it, during this time Sierra Times has been hacked, cracked, freaked, geeked, whipped, zipped, crammed, slammed, pinged, dinged... by any and every hacker, cracker, freak and geek out there. And just when we're to the point where we think we've got it licked, something comes in from somewhere else.

We've learned that many other web sites have been hit as well. It's been a week of zone alarms, virus checkers, server auditing, etc. In one case, two different servers spent almost an entire day on the phone chasing down little critters trying to mess with their systems. What does this mean to you? Where's that cutting edge news you were seeing on Sierra Times?

Answer: Sitting on our computers and in e-mail boxes. It's rare that we give an 'enemy' any credit, but I feel it's best to tell the Sierra Times audience what is going on behind the scenes. Another issue, online but still a way to go is the Roadhouse Sierra which brings me to the next topic.

You see, in this business, you gotta be a nice guy (even when you'd like to start cutting throats at times), but being blunt is about the only way to get this out.

There were a number of people who came to the conclusion that they could access Sierra Times only as a subscriber simply because they saw a message that had just one word missing (the word ROADHOUSE). And yes, many of you were surprised and angry about it. That is not true, and as far as I am concerned, never will be true. What almost made me lose my lunch was when some people even went to other news sites and message boards stating "Sierra Times is going the route of the New York Times" (which several exclamation points to follow). Questions came in such as "Why do we have to pay for news on Sierra Times?", etc.

Real Americans, no one here ever said you had to pay for news. Still, until a few days ago, it was a shock to some long time readers that Roadhouse Sierra was even created. It was announced back on June 1, and started June 23. Here I am on August 4, explaining again what it is, and why it got started.

Let me explain how this Internet business works. The model designed by the big boys of Madison avenue was doomed to fail, It was based on a combination of radio, television and print media advertising. Someone thought the same idea would work out here in cyberspace; hence - banner ads.

People hate commercials. They also hate banner ads.

Despite what you hear, banner ads may produce revenue for the host, but for the advertiser - well, maybe if you're a porn site, but that's it. And there is something else the big boys forgot when working up their Internet marketing model. A typical broadcast commercial radio or television station (or network) can spend a fixed amount to broadcast their signal. There is no difference in cost if 100,000 people or 2 million people make up their audience. They can just charge more for advertising. This is not the case with the Internet. The more "viewers" we get, the more it cost us. It's called 'bandwidth'.

Add that to the fact that people hate banner ads. In radio, and television, you have to sit there and listen or watch the commercials during the show. On the net, you can breeze right past those commercials. And since most folks visit a web site for information - not the commercials, they frequently can't even remember seeing a banner ad there.

We studied this fact at Sierra Times.com, watching site after site go down the tubes with investment dollars being eaten up by massive support staffs and operating costs. Notably - many were news sites. Most news sites don't have much 'for sale' on their own. They just provide information and commentary. Sponsors, or donations do the rest. Back in May, we experienced a situation in which revenue from sales on this site never reached us due to another dot-com failure. We were forced to scramble for donations in order to keep Sierra Times operating past June 1, 2001.

That is what killed the print version of Sierra Times - the monthly publication for Real Americans. Those who signed up were refunded their money, and the rest was paid for out of pocket here. Sure, we could have hired a bunch of lawyers to chase down the folks who ran off with the money. But Sierra Times wouldn't be here. Maintaining this web site operation has always been our FIRST priority. We were forced again (and I vowed for the last time) to ask for donations.

It was at that time that an e-mail came in to our feedback that forced us not only to look over that cliff, but to jump off the ledge and take our chances...

"...I am sending a check in for \$xxx, which breaks down to \$xx/mo subscription fee. This is slightly more than my yearly subscription to the Washington Times, but on a par with a number of other web sites. Here is the deal: I can take a tax deduction with a subscription, but can't with a donation. So this either becomes a paid subscription site or I would like a refund. Subsidies are anathema to a conservative. Checks in the mail..."

Yes, that was a slap in the face to us. But this loyal reader was right. "Subsidies are anathema to a conservative". What the hell are we doing passing around a tin cup, when we're supposed to be fighting for good old American freedom - which includes capitalism and free enterprise?

Hence, we went to work on the plan to created a section of Sierra Times for paid members only - flying in the face of everything the so-called "experts" said was the "third rail" of the Internet. The Internet Rule: "People don't pay for content."

Tell that to a webmaster of a pornographic web site.

What the rule should say is: "People don't pay for content they can get free elsewhere", or people don't pay for left-wing content, since it litters the airwaves everywhere. Yes, the federal government subsidizes the Public Broadcast System (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR). Just imagine what it would be like if the federal government funded Fox News and Rush Limbaugh.

Still, this will not sit well with some folks out there who claim to be conservative. In the words of one who wrote in to Sierra Times : "...Too bad you had to ruin a good thing by going commercial...."

Get this: Sierra Times.com is a subsidiary of J.J. Johnson Enterprises, *Incorporated*. (See that word in there?)

Sierra Times *has always been commercial*, and it should be. But there are folks out there who visit this and other websites daily expecting their news, information and commentary to magically appear each day, never thinking that it takes operating capital to make that work.

To complicate the challenge, the Internet News industry is fast and competitive. The other news you see is more entertainment and propaganda driven than what you see on the net. Even though we are in competition with other popular sites such as World Net Daily, Newsmax, Etherzone and others for viewers, they are not our true opposition by any means. All us of together are jointly in direct competition with Major Media. I can say that WND's Joe Farah (from his speech in May) and I know this first hand. Even if you don't see us mentioned in Major Media, you can bet we're being talked about in the smoke filled editor's rooms. "Get that damn story out before it shows up on one of these damn web sites!!"

Our mission (if I may speak for the other internet news site), is to prove that Internet News is a viable marketing product. All of these sites were built to fill a vacuum in the information industry. We are in effect, 'building a better mouse trap'. The difference between news organizations on the Internet and others is that we have to be credible - the other guys don't have to - they just have to look good saying it.

So, let me explain how this works. You expect that hot story to be on Sierra Times.com. We get the news tip. We have to call the source(s) to get the story right. The phone bill has to be paid. In some cases, as you know, Sierra Times has a person on the scene to cover major events. We have to pay for the transportation, and their communication costs. But we get that story - bringing more folks in to view Sierra Times, which in turn drives up the web site costs. Add to this the fact that the Sierra Times Ranch Hands (the staff) cannot sit chained to their computers for free. They all have bills to pay as well. I suppose this sounds obvious, as most folks already know this. But we're learning (via the Roadhouse) that some things you just have to explain in detail.

Sierra Times did not start out with 'venture capital'. Sierra Times does not have 'corporate sponsors'. We don't stay in lavish homes, have big offices, or big paychecks for the boss. In most cases, you'll find at least one of us on the road, on the phone, losing sleep to get that story and get it published for the world while the web staff fights off the latest cyber attack. That's what we do here.

Roadhouse Sierra was created to raise revenue for Sierra Times.com - plain and simple- so we don't have to ask for donations. In return, Roadhouse Sierra will provide to those paying members commentary and features they will not find anywhere else on the internet. Yes, we have even had folks send us things from other places requesting it be placed in that area. The rule is: If it was seen on the Internet somewhere else, it cannot go in the Roadhouse. It has to be unique.

So, for those folks who think we're "going corporate", don't worry. No one is being FORCED to join Roadhouse Sierra. There are those who are joining the Roadhouse to make sure your visit to Sierra Times will always remain free. But please excuse them while they get a little more than you do.

There were some who actually thought we were all but committing crimes against humanity by daring to charge for any portion of this site. We were not the first, and I'm sure will not be the last. We're not the oil companies or airline industries who can raise and lower prices in unison. Mark your calendar on this day, then check back in 2002. By then I can promise you, more web sites will follow suit. In fact, I predict that by about 2005, you will find very few free internet sites left standing.

OK, I'm off my soapbox. I know many of you are saying, "J.J. - just shut up and get back to gather news". You're right - That's exactly what we'll get back to doing. Back to the battlefield.

Thanks for stopping by,  
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